

THE SITUATION OF THE JEWS IN POLAND.

By Dr. Gotthard Deutsch.

Historic Aspect.

The Jews who form approximately 16 per cent of the total population of the former kingdom of Poland, rising in the cities to 40 per cent (Warsaw), and in some instance even 80 per cent (Berdyczew), have been living in these territories since they were opened to civilization. Legend speaks of a Jew, Abraham Prochnovnik, who was elected king of Poland in 840 but declined, nominating Piast who became the founder of the dynasty ruling Poland for several centuries (840-1370). Another legend reports that Duke Leszek formerly invited the Jews who were persecuted in western Europe to settle in his land, 905.

While these stories can not be accepted as real facts, it is certain that individual Jews did live in Poland in these early days, and undisputed evidence proves them to have had organized congregations in the 13th cent., as the contemporary rabbinic author, Eliezer of Bohemia, reports, and as is evident from the charter issued by king Boleslaus IV. in 1264, confirmed and amplified in 1334 by his successors, Casimir III (1337-1370), whom Polish historians call the Great and Casimir IV (1447-1492) in the first year of his reign. The Jews are given autonomy in internal affairs, and the legislation shows throughout their importance in the economic life of the country.

The Jews, therefore, are no new comers in Poland. Their actual existence dates back over a thousand years and their historic importance as a factor in the economic development of the country is proven by undisputed evidence for the last 700 years. When western Europe either expelled the Jews (England, 1290; France, 1394; Spain, 1492; Portugal, 1496; various German states and numerous cities, especially the free cities, in the course of 15th century), the Jews migrated in large numbers to Poland, where they furnished the missing middle class. The Poles, then being a primitive people, had only peasants and nobles. The Jews furnished the mechanics, merchants and financiers, replacing the Germans who up to that time furnished the bourgeois elements in the primitive beginning urban life. So it is still today, as can be seen by the numerous Jewish tailors, shoemakers, locksmiths, tinsmiths, carpenters, house-painters, barbers, etc., who come from Poland and have settled in this country.

This is not the time to speak of the selfishness of the nobles and the fanaticism of the Jesuits who brought the country to ruin, when the activity of the Jews tended to make it economically independent of its western neighbors, but we may point to the unsuspected testimony of an Italian priest Scipione Pattioli, the adviser of the last king of Poland, Stanislaus Augustus Potiowski, 1764-1795, who suggested to the king as one of the ways in which Poland's independence could be protected from the greed of her neighbors to grant to the Jews greater freedom.

Patriotism of the Polish Jews.

When the Poles tried to win back their independence with the aid of Napoleon, their great patriot Kosciuszko called upon the Jews for assist-

ance. Among those who responded to this call was the Jew, Berek Josilovitch, who equipped a regiment of Jews at the head of which he was killed in action near Kotzk, May 5, 1809. A Polish noble placed a monument on the spot where he fell, and in Lemberg a monument was erected in his honor on the centenary of his death. Berek's son, Joseph Berkovitch, followed in the footsteps of his father and in 1831 organized a Jewish legion in the renewed futile attempt to resuscitate the kingdom of Poland. When in 1846 again an attempt was made to regain Poland's independence, the first insurgent battalion in Vracow counted 40 Jews, several of whom fell on the barricades fighting for their fatherland. Czyski, the Polish patriot, believes that the failure of the revolution was due to Catholic fanaticism. The Jewish poet, Moritz Hartmann (1821-1872), and the Jewish publicist and politicians, Moritz Veit (1806-1864), advocated the cause of Poland, and the German poet, Heinrich Laube (1806-1884, who, living in the German-Polish border province of Silesia, was certainly familiar with the conditions, presents in his novel "Die Krieger" the figure of a Jew who is an ardent Polish patriot. In the last attempt of the Poles to regain their national independence by the armed uprising, in 1861, the Jews took an active part in the movement from the start. The chief rabbi of Warsaw, Berish Meisels (1800-1870), appealed to his community to take part in the liberation of Poland, and he as well, as the preacher of the liberal congregation, Marcus Jastrow (1829-1903), the father of professors Joseph Jastrow of the University of Wisconsin and Morris Jastrow of the University of Pennsylvania, arrested by the Russian government as traitors. Jastrow, who was a native of Prussian Poland, was exiled, and so great was the confidence in his Polish patriotism that a Polish district in Prussian Poland offered him the nomination as representative in the Prussian diet. Another proof of the sympathy of the Jews with the Polish cause is seen in the attempt of the Russian government to win them over by the repeal of the law which prohibited the acquisition of real estate by Jews, May 24, 1861, which was followed by a similar law, issued by the Polish national government, June 5. This government recognized the loyalty of the Jews in a manifesto issued in 1863 shortly before the collapse of the revolution.

We have proof for the loyalty of the Jews from two independent sources during the latest period. The Jewish publicist, W. Kaplun-Kogan, in a pamphlet "Der Krieg eine Schicksalstunde des Juedischen Volkes," published in 1814, pleads for the reconstruction of an independent Poland, and the English publicist, Stephen Graham, who is strongly prejudiced against the Jews, wrote in the London "Times," Oct. 29, 1914: "Jews and Poles have been fellow sufferers from and are united in common hatred against Russian autocracy." In order to appreciate the value of these testimonies one must remember that in 1914 the resurrection of Poland was high treason in Germany as well as in Russia, and that the then existing treaty between England and Russia had promised to the czar the annexation of both Austrian and Prussian Poland. In the latter sections

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